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ABSTRACT

The effects of large-scale improvement projects and the trend toward decentralization on the principal's role in primary and secondary schools in Belgium are explored in this paper. Particular focuses are on the ways in which sociopolitical change influences the nature of school-level leadership and on strategies that principals use in response to government-mandated decentralization efforts. Within the turbulent policy environment of the Belgium educational system, decision making must always be justified. A review of three studies of primary schools involved in reform projects examines two areas of decision making and justification: the organization of linkages with external and internal support structures. Findings indicate that local factors, particularly the principal, shape the nature and quality of change. Variability is therefore natural and inherent in the educational system. The local capacity to organize internal support and local willingness to work productively with external support are important factors for the success of innovative efforts. The recommendation is made for collaboration between the leadership team and a local council to develop internal and external support structures and an assessment center. Because local policy and changes in policy are the result of interaction between many events and activities, the history of critical decisions within a school and their impacts on the improvement process must be examined to obtain information about the underlying justification process. (24 references) (LMI)

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SYMPOSIUM: THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BELGIUM

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The changing role of school principals in Primary and Secondary Schools in Belgium

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the meaning of the evolving role of school principals in the context of national large-scale improvement projects requires basic information about the national, social and economic scene. This is difficult given the limits of a research paper. So, in this paper some information about the socio-political context, in rather general terms, will be provided. On the other hand, given the fact that during the last twenty years, Primary as well as Secondary Schools in Belgium have been confronted with large-scale reform proposals, it is essential to explore the characteristics of these proposals in relation to the (new) tasks for principals. By doing so, we will focus on the ways in which contextual changes are influencing the nature of leadership exercised at the local school level and on the strategies which principals employ as they respond to attempts by central governmental authorities to decentralize decision making. In other words, we assume that the large-scale improvement projects and the general trend towards decentralization are two seminal areas for understanding the changing role of principals. In both areas it is important to look at the way principals are re-arranging the local work environment.

For some observators the two areas are not unrelated; they have underlined the fact that the unprepared and too loosely planned introduction of large-scale projects have created many problems. Decentralisation, that is schools getting the autonomy to solve some of these problems, was then considered by the policy makers as an overall solution.

In this paper research findings concerning the study of the innovation process in Primary Schools will be presented to illustrate the changing role of principals. Information about the renewal of Secondary Schools in Belgium will be used to broaden the discussion.

BELGIUM: THE POLITICAL ARENA

Although Belgium is a small country (almost 10 million people; 30.000 square kilometers) it is a very complex one. It is impossible to describe in a few lines the constitutional system, the interactions of political institutions and the consequences for the educational system. So, we will focus on some general information which is needed for the understanding of the educational system (for a detailed description of Belgium, see Boudart, Boudart & Bryssinck, 1990).

There are presently in Belgium three regions. They were constitutionally defined only in 1970, but two have existed as such since the time of independence (1830): the Flemish region, commonly called Flanders, and the Walloon region. The third is more recent: the Brussels region, which comprises the city of Brussels and its eighteen suburbs. The constituent element of a region is its territory.

Besides the regions, there are also three communities : the Dutch, French and German speaking (In Belgium we have three official languages). The constituent element of a community is its culture and language. The inhabitants of Flanders (the northern part of Belgium) speak Dutch; the inhabitants of Wallonia speak French. Between these two communities is a clearly defined language border. In eastern Wallonia there is a small group of German-speaking Belgians. The Brussels region is linguistically mixed since it includes both Dutch- and French-speaking people. The exact proportion of the two groups remains a bone of contention in Belgian public life. Related to this language puzzle, the Constitution established four linguistic regions : a Dutch language region, a French and a German language region, and a bilingual region for the capital city of Brussels.

The communities are responsible for education (although there are still some matters which are centrally governed, such as: educational structures, diplomas, salaries). As a result, for the moment (1991) Belgium has three Ministers of Education (one for the Dutch speaking community and two for the French (including the German) speaking community (see: Educational developments in Belgium, 1988).

By virtue of constitutional liberty, education in Belgium may be organized by different organizing authorities. In the Dutch community, the so-called ARGO (Autonomous Council for Community schools) has since 1989-'90 the organizing responsibility for the former state schools. Also provinces and municipalities have their own educational system. Furthermore the so-called free schools are organized by private individuals or non-profit associations. Catholic schools are by far the most numerous of the "free schools". In these three groups of schools, there is lately a marked development towards decentralization. This means that more and more schools can develop a local policy. Within some limits, schools can make some locally adapted decisions. On the other hand, it is also

typical that the local organizing authorities for the free schools and for the provicial and communal schools have created a coordinating body in Brussels. All catholic schools in Flanders are coordinated by the National Secretariat of Catholic Education. The same is true for the provincial and communal schools; they also are represented by a nationally organized body. For the former state schools (now the community schools) the so-called ARGO plays the same coordinating role.

This description may give a background for an exploration of some characteristics of the Belgian system which are relevant for understanding the (changing) role of principals.

First: the political development in Belgium renders more autonomy for educational policy development to the communities. As a result, during the last four to five years laws have been passed. These laws are characterized by decentralization and deregulation : there is a clear tendency to de-emphasize the role of the central administration. This implies that local schools have to redefine their local policy issues, such as: cooperation with parents, use of the available teacher-hours, hiring of teachers, collaboration with schools in the local area, etc. ... In general, decentralization and deregulation create opportunities for developing a local policy. Given this context, the changing internal operations of the local schools became an interesting research area. The question how schools react to these new opportunities became prominent in the research program of the Center for Educational Policy and Innovation of the University of Leuven (see below).

However, taking into consideration the competition between the three organizing authorities, there is a clear countermovement. As we already indicated the local schools are coordinated, for several reasons, by central administrative bodies in Brussels. The existence of these coordinating bodies, which have a long and strong tradition in Belgian educational politics, results into a parallel form of centralization. From interviews with Secondary School principals we learned that the administrative rules enacted by the Minister of Education are interpreted in sometimes long elaborations by this coordinative bodies. This is sometimes useful for the principal, but in these interviews it also became clear that some principals do not always agree with the "coloured" elaboration. Other examples could be added to illustrate this counter-movement. The conclusion is that a principal lives nowadays in three worlds: a (decreased) set of regulations coming from the central government, an "explanatory" draft of these regulations including some expectations and the local school that holds the principal responsible for the implementation of regulations and expectations at the local school level. This is a complex network in which a school leader has to operate. A principal who is concerned about the internal operation of the school and about the connections with the local and national environment, must be a master in decision making and especially in justifying the (daily) decisions and

related activities. We will elaborate this idea later on.

Second: parents may freely select a school for their children, in accordance with their ideological or political opinion. All schools, also non-denomenational schools, are subsidized by the central government, provided the schools conform to some legal and statuary conditions. Thus, there are central requirements and rules a school must accept. The quality of the education is controled by a central inspectorate.

The freedom of choice on the part of the parents results into a strong competition between schools. There is not only a competition between schools belonging to different organizing authorities, but also between schools from the same authority. A central concerns for each school is to attract as many students as possible, and this is one of the main responsibilities of the principal. School principals are considered to be effective leaders when they are able to increase the number of their students, particularly since the number of students determines the amount of subsidized teacher-hours. Part of these hours are needed for the organization of the teaching activities. But another part - and this is a local decision - can be allocated for middle management such as internal assistance; chairing task groups, etc. (Vandenberghe, 1988). In other words, the more students, the more space for the improvement of local working conditions which in turn may improve the quality of teaching. This is an example of the confrontation between the central rule (every year the ratio for the number of teacher-hours is redefined) and the organization of a local school. In some schools the available hours are used for teaching activities only; in other schools they are partly used for the organization of non-teaching activities.

Third: freedom of education together with the provision of a budget by the central government led to a political balance. One aspect of the balance is the requirements concerning the basis curricular goals for Primary and Secondary Education. There is a central mandatory list of subjects to be taught in Primary and Secondary Schools and in some cases the number of teaching hours per subject is centrally determined. Each organizing authority (or the central organizations representing the local organizing authorities) has curriculum teams for the development of curricula for the various subjects. These curricula have to be approved by the Minister as a requirement for subsidizing a school. Although, for instance, each local catholic school has the legal right to develop a curriculum for this particular school, this never occurs. The work is done by the representative national body which acts as an intermediary between the local school and the Minister of Education. But, it is obvious that there is room for local adaptation of the centrally developed curricula. The existence of centrally designed and approved curricula implies the possibility of control. This is done by inspectors. Yet there remains an important question about the impact of the curricula on the daily teaching activities. Many observers claim that the manuals used by the teachers have more impact

than a centrally designed curriculum. But all the publishing companies use the existing curricula as a basis for the development of manuals and teaching materials. From the point of view of the principal this means that the general (central) requirements and the more specific requirements described in the curricula must be met. It implies that the principal will have to visit classrooms regularly with the controlling inspector.

Fourth: a last important feature relates to the fact that the central government proposed and actually imposed several large-scale reforms for Primary and Secondary Schools. Since the Minister is responsible for the quality and development of the educational system, he has the right to propose new structures. During the last twenty years, several important changes have been introduced. We will use these large-scale projects as a context for a more detailed discussion of the changing role of the principal.

These four issues illustrate the complexity of the political and policy environment for a school and for a principal in particular. The exploration of some characteristics of large-scale improvement projects will underscore this observation.

LARGE-SCALE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS: CREATORS OF A TURBULENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT

During the last twenty years, in Belgium as well as in other Westeuropean countries, the Minister of Education initiated large-scale improvement projects. An analysis of this type of improvement projects is presented in more detail in Van den Berg & Vandenberghe, 1986. Here, we focus on the consequences for the school and for the role of the principal.

The school, and the principal have to work and to survive in a very complex, changing and turbulent policy environment. This has serious consequences which are sometimes difficult to grasp. For instance, the renewal of the Secondary School in Belgium led to an unbalanced debate in which unverified statements about the low quality of the Secondary School played a prominent role. Schools and principals were forced into an ongoing process of justification vis à vis the local community and parents. Schools participating in the Renewed Primary School-project have to establish a new mode of collaboration with members of a team of external change facilitators who operate in addition to the existing inspectorate. In the Renewed Secondary School - project schools may use a number of teacher hours to establish a so-called grade-coordinator (an internal change facilitator). The installation of this new internal structure is a new task for the principal. It implies not only a justification for the use of the teacher hours with respect to the staff, but it also implies the construction of a new set of interactions between principal

and middle management, and between teachers and members of the middle management (Vandenberghe, 1988). In summary: this turbulent policy environment has important consequences for the organizational life of the school and for the creation of communication links with the central policy and the local environment.

Given this situation, schools (and principals) will have to react differently, and as a consequence schools will construct different local (innovation) policies which are determined by the school principal, in the context of the existing culture of the school, the innovation history, etc... This will be illustrated with research data from the R.P.S.-project in Dutch speaking community of Belgium.

Large-scale improvement projects: characteristics and illustrations

Most large-scale projects (such as the R.S.S. and the R.P.S.) have a reform-nature. An educational reform is related to economic, social and cultural developments. In other words: the societal context has an impact on the aims and structure of schools. When judging a reform, political, social and economic factors are predominant.

This is clearly illustrated in the R.S.S. in Belgium (started in 1970). The R.S.S. is related to a major political goal: secondary education for all. Pupils from different social classes should have the same opportunities. In other words: there was (and is) the claim for equity, meaning that each pupil has the same rights, e.g. in relation to the time spent at school, the time spent on subjects within the school, etc...independently of race, sex and social class (see also: Murphy & Hallinger, 1989). But there is also the claim for equality. Education has to provide everybody with the opportunity for access to knowledge, with similar experiences and to a irreducible minimum, as well as to contribute to every aspect of personal and social growth. These general ideas of external democratisation of secondary education have serious consequences for the structure of secondary schools (from a selective to a comprehensive system), for the development of a school career (from a selection at the age of twelve to a guided orientation to different study domains), for the selection of subject content (differentiation between basic and extra goals), for the organisation of classroom activities (teachers have to work with more heterogeneous groups), and for the role of evaluation (the importance of formative evaluation) (for a more detailed analysis, see Vandenberghe, 1988).

So, with the case of edcuational reform the policy and general aims are stated out in general terms. However, in most cases, there are no indications for the actual implementation of these general aims. In other words: "the people concerned with creating the policy and enacting the relevant legislation seldom look down the track to implementation" (Porter, 1980, p.75). The central government assigns the task of implementa-

tion to others, the principal being one of them.

Given general aims of a reform and its consequences, one comes to the conclusion that a large-scale project is characterized by its multidimensionality : a number of important objectives must be accomplished simultaneously and coherently. Each innovation, as part of the reform, points to a significant array of more specific objectives and activities. The expectation is that all the innovations will be adopted at the same time and implemented in interrelated ways. This is extremely difficult if not impossible for local schools. Again, this characterisation points out the necessity of a local response to this multi-dimensionality. And again, there are indications that the principal is responsible for that locally adapted answer.

The multidimensionality of a reform is also a striking feature of the R.P.S. (started in 1973) (see R. Vandenberghe, 1987 a; 1987 b). The main goals of the R.P.S. are related to the following themes. Enhanced integration and interdependence between the kindergarten (2.5 years - 6 years) and the elementary school , (6-12 years). Also an enhanced continuity between the different grades of the primary school. Increased and more effective individualisation during the elementary grades, particularly)in relation to reading and arithmetic. It is expected that teachers adapt their teaching activities taking into consideration differences among pupils. Enhanced contact and collaboration between classroom teachers and a remedial teacher, so that pupils with special problems in regular classrooms will be worked with more effectively. There is an emphasis also on more collaboration among teachers and pupils form different grades. Increased emphasis on the socio-emotional and creative development of the pupils. A more child-centered approach is one of the key ideas of the R.P.S. Better interdependence with resources in the community environment, in terms both of the pupils going out into the community to learn and of people from the community being used as resource - people on an ad-hoc basis within the school. In summary: the main theme of this innovation-bundle is more interdependence among educational resources to support a more individualized, humanized, and effective response to pupils.

Given this complexity, it is not at all surprising to observe that schools emphasize one of these themes. From evaluation data (collected between 1979 and 1981) we learned for instance, that the "individualization"-theme and the special attention for remedial teaching have led to various activities at the school level and at the classroom level. "Individualization" created teaching activities and teaching material of a different nature. At the school level, principals developed various in-service activities and staff development activities. In some cases they involved external change facilitators, sometimes they don't. In other words, the adoption of the R.P.S as a complex reform has led to a local process, characterized by a set of various activities at the classroom and at the school level. Schools create their own local

innovation policy.

This description of a large-scale improvement project illustrates that daily school life is getting rather complex. This background information illustrates the scene for the principals' job. Moreover, taking into consideration the way the coordinating bodies in Brussels organized and managed the implementation process (Vandenberghe, 1982), it becomes clear that an increased attention for the local school level is needed. There seems to be an implicit expectation that schools and principals deploy innovative activities, more or less independent from external policy bodies or outside agents. In other words, an increased attention for policy analysis at the local level in Belgian Primary and Secondary Schools is not only related to decentralization and deregulation, but also to the underlying assumption of improvement projects proposed during the last twenty years. The analysis of locally developed policies deserves serious attention. One of the main areas for exploration concerns the way in which principals make decisions and how they justify these decisions (see below) (see also Murphy & Hallinger, 1984). The complexity of this is reflected in a statement by a Secondary School principal: "Twenty years ago, being a principal was like conducting an orchestra playing an unfinished symphony - there was always something interesting to do. Now I've the feeling to conduct a group of musicians playing an ongoing cacophony". A turbulent national policy creates a local educational environment that is very difficult to manage.

A turbulent policy: recent developments

During the last five years, the possibilities and particularly the limitations of large-scale improvement projects, such as R.P.S. and R.S.S. aroused public debates among parents, teachers, teacher unions, policy-makers and researchers. For example, it became obvious that one of the central aims of the R.S.S., the guided orientation of pupils instead of a selection at the age of twelve, was difficult to achieve (Van Damme,.....) It became clear that teachers, being used to work with relatively homogeneous groups, experience great difficulties once they are confronted with heterogeneous groups. But it also became clear that the leading groups in the Flemish society did not accept the basic philosophy underlying the Renewed Secondary School. "Secondary Education for All", according to some critics, would lead to a serious decrease in the quality of education. There was a generally accepted, though unverified claim, that a re-orientation of the R.S.S. was necessary. This led to a political decision to instal (again) another type of Secondary School, as a compromise between a selective and a comprehensive structure. For Secondary School principals this means that they have to find ways to motivate teachers again for another change. And teachers have again to work with other curricula.

These latest developments confirm what already has been said about a turbulent policy environment and about the importance of studying the local (innovation) policy. Improvement projects aiming at significant, system-wide change proved difficult to implement all at once. Trying to implement too much too soon is a very difficult undertaking (see also McLaughlin, 1990). It seems that policy-makers are not aware of these difficulties. They still believe that their main task is to make political and policy decisions and that an undefined group of "others" is responsible for the implementation of political decisions. No wonder, that parallel central bodies translate the general decisions into more specific structures, decisions and rules (see above).

Additional to these recent developments, there is also the fact that the economic crisis had resulted either in depriving the school of additional resources, or in preventing significant increases of these resources in the face of the growing complexity of the changes to be implemented in each school. In the early seventies, schools got extra resources as a reward for engaging in a national improvement project. (For instance, Secondary Schools got extra teacher hours.) This is no longer the case. The economic contraction on no-growth is aggravated by a demographic contraction. There are less children for the same schools. And since the number of pupils determines the resources, there is a serious competition between schools.

Both types of contraction - a decreased budget and less children for the same number of schools - led to a remarkable policy decision. The decreased national budget for education resulted in more freedom for the school as far as the use of teacher-hours is concerned (since 1984-85), more freedom in the reallocation of tenured teachers (since 1986-'87) and in the use of the local school budget (since 1983) (see Devos, Vandenberghe & Verhoeven, 1989 a; 1989 b; Verhoeven & Vandenberghe, 1989). These are indeed indications of a decentralized policy, but the actual implementation at the local school level has created unexpected and, we believe, unintended difficulties. As we pointed out the number of teacher-hours is determined by the number of pupils. But the ratio changes almost every year and information about this is provided very late. As a result it is very difficult for a principal to know in time how many teacher-hours will be available. Long-term planning becomes almost impossible. In schools with a decreased number of pupils, teachers lose their job. There is a general rule saying that other schools in the regio should integrate those teachers in the existing staff. At the national level this means that it is nowadays very difficult for young teachers to find a job. But at the local level it means for the principal that the integration of a number of new teachers creates every year extra problems and that it is almost impossible to build up a long term human resources management. In other words, the school-based control over staffing decreases. In this context, it is difficult for principals to reinforce and to maintain a vision (see also

Louis & Miles, 1990, p.221). In summary, decentralisation preached by the central government is experienced by the principals as "rhetoric". Again an ever changing, unclear and turbulent policy environment permanently creates new tasks and many management difficulties.

PRINCIPALS' REACTIONS TOWARDS A TURBULENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT: VARIATIONS ON ONE THEME

In an organisation (e.g. a school) surrounded by a turbulent policy environment, characterized by a set of unclarities, ill-defined expectations, constantly changing requirements and administrative rules, there is one task for a principal which is very prominent: those who are responsible for the management of the organization must be able to justify permanently all general and specific decisions they take. This permanent justification is one of the main requirements for effective leadership. As a result of a turbulent policy environment, the organization members are expected to reorganize their work and to change their routine behaviours. There is a strong pressure to change and to adapt and in some cases unexpected new administrative rules have a serious impact on what the principal and the teachers can do. But there is also the concern that every decision is experienced as a provisional one, because of new expectations, rules, parents' and teachers' reactions. This situation is very well portrayed by a Secondary School principal saying: "Nowadays a principal has to write with a pencil, since what is written today by a pencil can easily be gummed tomorrow".

This increased claim for justification is an inherent characteristic of a school, being an organisation with various responsibilities. Yet, in this turbulent policy environment schools are expected to guarantee an education of a high quality. Parents expect a "good" education for their children. Schools also have to take into consideration requirements of the labour-market. Both, parents and the labour-market question the quality and the effects of such improvement progress. So, taking part in a reform project increases the pressure to justify the school's functioning. Secondary Schools which strive towards "stability" appeared to be rewarded: the number of students increased compared to these schools which tried to implement the aims of the R.S.S.

But, there is not only the justification towards the "outside world", there is also the pressure on the principal to legitimate his or her decisions with respect to the staff. How shall we use the extra teacher-hours ? Do we need indeed a remedial teacher or shall we use the hours in another way ? In general, we see that the more deregulation from the top,

the more responsibility for the principal and as a result, the more justification is expected.

In other words, our assumption is that what ultimately must be changed is the governing process and structure of schools. The modifications needed as a result of an ever changing and turbulent policy environment, cannot and will not occur if schools are not able to restructure their internal organization. This assumption is also reflected in discussions in the USA about "restructuring". According to Raywid, "the relationship of schools to both their external and internal environments is so fundamentally flawed that change in how they are governed is so essential for significant school improvement of any sort - curricular, instructional, and so on" (1990, p. 152). Like in the U.S.A., schools (especially Secondary Schools) are no longer "in accord with their political environments - that is, with the desires of the parents and the communities they presumably serve and with the political system whose procedural principles public institutions are obliged to reflect" (Raywid, 1990, p.152).

In this context, it is central for future research to study how schools organize and structure this justification task. One can assume that schools will organize this task differently. In other words: there will be many variations on the same theme. Although it is not always clear what the particular impact is, one can expect that the principal plays a crucial role in this justification process.

The organization of this process of permanent justification is not the establishment of a set of rational decisions and activities. The nature of this process and concomitant activities can be studied and illustrated, we believe, by analyzing decisions, procedures and interventions in relation to the participation by schools in a large-scale improvement project. During the mobilisation phase as well as during the early implementation phase, many decisions are made and many new activities evolve. Through the study of these planned and unplanned decisions and activities, one can gain insight in this justification process.

We will limit the discussion to two related areas. The first one is the establishment and organisation of linkages with external support structures. How are these linkages structured and what is the role of the principal ? The second area concerns the generation and establishment of an internal support structure. Here too, a principal has to make decisions.

Local innovation policy and the role of the principal: the R.P.S in Belgium (Vandenberghe, 1987 b; 1988)

In a study conducted during the school year 1981-'82, two central research questions were studied. The first question was based on the assumption that schools, confronted with the requirements of a large-scale project will develop a 'local

innovation policy' (L.I.P.). We also assumed that it would be possible to distinguish general patterns or types of local innovation policy. The second question concerned the relationship between the type of local innovation policy and the degree of implementation of the general aims of the R.P.S. (see the description of the general R.P.S.- aims). We limit the next discussion to the first question.

101 teachers and 24 principals of 24 schools were interviewed. The qualitative data have been organized around five variables (purposeful co-ordination of implementation activities via planning; the establishment of structural information channels in the school; professional relationships among the staff; school-specific character of the implementation-activities; information activities during the mobilization stage). Each variable was carefully defined and all the interview questions were linked to one specific variable.

The L.I.P. of each school was described, using the five variables as a framework. These descriptions were then systematically compared. It soon became clear that it was possible to cluster the schools into four groups, or four types of L.I.P.

Analyzing these four types, it is obvious that indeed schools and principals make different decisions as far as internal and external support is concerned.

In a school with a L.I.P. characterised by Planning the implementation efforts are coordinated by means of a plan, developed by the principal, wherein a number of specific indications for changes in the classroom practices are pointed out. This leads to many changes at relative short notice. The principal communicates systematically and frequently about the plan and about the changes he would like to see implemented. This communication occurs during staff meetings and during many informal conversations. Whenever the principal thinks an external change facilitator is an expert on a specific innovation topic, he invites him.

The description of this first type of L.I.P. leads to two observations with respect to the justification process. First, justification takes place through daily, specific decisions and activities. These principals find the aims of the R.P.S. important and this importance is communicated by activities of a planned nature: there is a plan; an ongoing communication about this plan, a clear communication of expectations and an active principal in building up a relationship with members of an external support structure. These persons come into the school when the principal and the staff believe they can solve a particular problem or support some specific activities. Second, the principal is the key person. He does not try to convince the staff by using rational arguments. The general decision to start the improvement process and the more specific decisions (e.g. "we will work on remedial teaching in our school") is justified by his supportive plan-

ning activities.

In a school, with a L.I.P. characterized by Interaction, we see that the justification activities are of a different nature. Here the principals create opportunities for frequent deliberations and consultations among the staff. These principals focus on the involvement of the total staff. Unlike the Planning-schools, it is more difficult for the interaction-schools to start the implementation activities. Once the decision is made, many specific changes in the classrooms are observed. External change facilitators follow the evolution closely through frequent visits to the schools. They offer school-focused support. Here too, it is important to emphasize that justification occurs through daily activities and decisions.

The picture is different looking at the two other types of L.I.P. In the schools characterized by Risk Avoidance there usually are lengthy and difficult discussions about specific decisions. The staff goes through a long process of deliberation to get a detailed overview of the problems experienced in the school and the classrooms. They search for an adapted answer to these problems in terms of innovation attempts that everybody considers as feasable in the own school context. There is a serious attempt to involve everybody, but also to minimize potential risks. Such a process of intensive deliberation requires much time and usually results in only a few changes in a few classrooms during the early implementation phase. There is no specifed working relationship with the external support structure. The school is looking for all kinds of information and external support. A specific policy to use external resources does not exist.

Here too, the principals took the decision to start the improvement process. But they communicate a type of justification characterized by doubts and fear for conflict. This is clearly another message compared to the Planning - and Interaction - schools.

The fourth type of L.I.P. is characterized by Cooptation. Typically, in these schools most specific changes in the classroom, as well as some changes in the internal structure of the school, are initiated and supported by an external facilitator. As time goes the school does not develop a collective attitude towards these changes or towards the innovation project. This type of L.I.P. may lead rather quickly to many though small changes but also to a few classroom changes. And, there is no guarantee that these changes will last.

Here, the principals do not play a significant role; they do not intervene substantially. This is a strange way of justifying the general decision to start an improvement process. The formal "Yes" to a proposal by the central government is justified by an absence of specific decisions and activities. In other words: doing nothing is a way of justifying a general

decision.

In summary: the four types of L.I.P. are characterized by different decisions and activities by the principals and they reflect different justification processes. We assume that principals working in schools with a Planning and Interaction policy, will survive in a turbulent policy environment and will find ways and means to adapt to changing requirements and administrative rules. Their way of justification enhances the chances for an ongoing improvement process. This is less the case for the schools of the two other types where we note a justification process which tends to sustain routine and stability.

Implementation of School Based Review: role of the principal and impact on the change process (Vandenberghe, D'hertefelt, Wouters & Van Dooren, 1989).

In another study the implementation of a procedure for School Based Review (S.B.R.) was studied. Schools which wanted to join the R.P.S.-project had to go through a planned procedure for S.B.R. before they could start officially as a "Renewed Primary School". It was expected that as a result of this review, schools should have a plan in which the innovation they want to implement and the time line for the next year are clearly specified (Depoortere, De Soete & Hellyn, 1987).

During the school year 1984-'85 the implementation of the School Based Review in 34 Primary Schools was studied. Information about the specific activities and the evaluation by the teachers of the value of the proposed procedures was collected. In the next school year (1985-'86), 12 out of the 34 schools were extensively studied. The 12 principals and 55 teachers were interviewed. One research question concerned the relationship between the quality of the SBR-activities during the previous year and the characteristics of the implementation activities during the following year. In other words: do the schools implement the innovations they planned at the end of the review year and is the quality of their implementation activities related to the quality of the previous review process ?

Here too schools organize the review process and the implementation activities very differently. And here too we consider these activities as indications of the justification process.

The analysis of the interviews resulted in the distinction of four groups of schools. The main differences between these four groups concern the degree and quality of implementation activities. In group 1 (n = 3 schools), for instance, although they had decided at the end of the review year to focus on a specific innovation, there were no (or a very few) activities directed at the implementations of the innovation. On the contrary, in group 4 (n = 3 schools) all teachers are involved in implementation activities, there is a well defined internal support structure and teachers believe that there is

a good chance for continuation of the implementation activities.

Comparing these two groups, and taking into consideration the central issue of this paper, we will look at differences in decisions and activities which reflect different justification patterns by principals. The number of staff meetings did not differentiate between both groups of schools: all principals organized staff meetings during which the "innovation" (e.g. individualized reading) was on the agenda. But there were two striking differences. First: the time provided for discussion was significantly longer in group 4 than in group 1. This simple observation reveals that the principals of group 4, by providing time, communicate to the teachers that the planned implementation activities are indeed important. In other words, the message is clear: since we have decided at the end of the review process to work on, for instance, individualization, it is justified to provide the necessary discussion time. Second: the nature of the discussions, according to the teachers differs. In group 1 all kinds of difficulties and obstacles are put on the meeting table but there is no real effort to solve the problems. In group 4 it is typical that teachers share problems and solutions. They also plan in a collaborative way the steps to be taken in the next weeks. Again, by supporting teachers with specific problems and by creating clear expectations through careful planning, the principals provide reasons to the teachers for understanding the importance of the activities they are working on.

There is another important difference between the two groups. In the schools of group 4 - and not of group 1 - the principal creates an internal support structure. Besides the principal there are 2 to 3 teachers who perform different tasks: e.g. preparing meetings, looking for information, chairing a subgroup. There is no longer one principal, but there is a leadership team. This is an example of a decision by the principal, through which the basic decision, at the end of the review year, is permanently justified to the teachers.

Finally, there is another finding. Both groups had regular contacts with external change facilitators. Here too, the number of contacts did not differentiate between the groups. But as in the study of types of Local Innovation Policy, here too schools interact in two different ways. Group 1 - schools accept every proposal from outside. These schools do not demonstrate any kind of autonomy; they "consume" every proposal by the external change facilitators. Group 4 -schools on the contrary have a more "pro-active" attitude; they invite an expert when they are confronted with a specific problem. The principal characterized by a consumer- type reaction, actually communicates to the teachers that what they have decided at the end of the review year is not so important.

The School Based Review, as it was established in the context of the R.P.S., required the production of written reports, plans and formal decisions. We observed that such require-

ments may lead to a "bureaucratic" response at the end of the review year and to a "cosmetic" behavior during the early implementation phase. There is a gap between the formal decision made by the principal and the staff and what is actually going on in the school and in the classrooms.
Schools create two different "images": one for the outsiders and one for internal use. In terms of justification, this means that for the principals it is almost impossible to engage teachers in improvement activities. Where there is no gap between the formal decision and daily school practices, principals create conditions (staff meetings, a leadership team, pro-active linkages with external change facilitators) which repeatedly prove that the decision they took is important and indeed can be implemented. In the first instance there is an empty, confusing justification. In the second one, there is a justification creating support and meaning for the teachers engaged in implementation activities.

Principals' interventions in eight Renewed Primary Schools
(Van der Perre, 1990; 1987)

This study, which is a longitudinal investigation of eight principals of a Renewed Primary School, was based on the assumption that continuous and school-oriented support may influence considerably the success of implementing an innovation. Principals are believed to be best suited to act as "internal facilitators". The interventions of the principals are considered in this paper as different ways to justify the basic decision to renew their school.

Eight principals, who in September 1980 initiated the R.P.S. in their school, were followed during two periods of three months (April, May, June of the 1982-'83 schoolyear and September, October, November of the 1983-'84 schoolyear).
Through weekly telephone interviews, information about all principals' interventions was collected and categorized. The information was not only restricted to innovation-related interventions, but also included non-innovation related interventions. Teachers were interviewed twice in order to check if the reported interventions actually had taken place. Between 79% and 92% of the reported interventions were confirmed by the teachers.

The analyses of the interventions and the different relations between the interventions was based on the definition of "intentionality" (Greenfield 1980). This means that the analysis of each cluster of interventions was based on the following questions; what, when, where, by whom and how ? The data were organized into four categories: interventions related to the selection and planning of innovation goals; interventions directed at the specification of these goals; interventions related to the support of implementation activities and interventions concerning the evaluation.

97 innovation-related goals were reported by the principals. Most of these goals were phrased in very general terms; others

could be considered as more specific and concrete. In 6 of the 8 schools the "general" goals outnumbered the "specific" ones. The opposite was true for the other two schools. In the 6 schools, the planned innovation goals did not in any way relate to a particular problem experienced in the school. The general decision to engage in the R.P.S.-project led to a number of activities which were not directed at the solution of a particular problem. Most of the goals were proposed by an external change facilitator and they were experienced by the teachers as "supplementary" activities (e.g. the general theme of integration of the kindergarten and the primary school is implemented through the organisation of three "integration days" during the schoolyear: children from group 3 of the kindergarten and children from grade 1 collaborate during one day). The picture in the two other schools was different: the diagnosis of specific problems was the main motive for the start of the R.P.S.-project. As a result, these two principals reported many school-focused innovation goals.

After the selection of the innovation goals, different problems of goal-specification were observed. Two thirds of the 97 goals were specified: the selected goals were specified in terms of learning and teaching activities. In most cases this was done by the external change facilitator (in 6 schools). In the two other schools this was predominantly done by the principal.

Once the decision was made about the specific teaching-learning activities, it was surprising that the number of supporting activities decreased drastically. For 54 out of the 97 reported goals, there were no supportive interventions by the principal or by any external change facilitator during the implementation phase. Looking at the nature of the intervention during this phase, it became clear that in almost fifty percent of the cases the intervention was limited to only one session during which additional information was presented to the teachers. Skill training was offered for only two innovative activities; observation in other classrooms, only six times; participation in the actual implementation activities by the principal only twice. From this summary, it is clear that the number of interventions by the principals decrease substantially, once specific implementation problems are at stake. This is not a surprising finding, but it illustrates the central thesis of this paper: the principal communicates through daily decisions and activities, his or her opinion about the importance of an innovation. It is a way of justifying his or her local (innovation) policy.

Interventions related to the evaluation of the innovation goals were reported in a limited number. Only 28 goals were evaluated. In this category, fourteen interventions were of a controlling nature: this means that the principal asked the teachers to report about their activities. In the other fourteen activities, the evaluation was directed at the solution of specific implementation problems.

As to the central theme of this paper it is important to note that principals only for a very limited number of innovation goals establish a complete set of interventions going from planning, through specification, to supporting implementation and evaluation. We found this complete cycle in two schools and for a limited number of goals. Here too, we like to stress the fact that teachers experience different justification styles.

Like in the previous studies, differences in the collaboration with external change facilitators are obvious. Only in two cases, a more independent or pro-active type of collaboration could be observed. This means that in six schools innovation related activities where planned and to some extent supported almost entirely by an external change facilitator. In the two other schools, external change facilitators were asked to provide extra information or material for problems experienced by the teachers during the implementation phase.

Principals' reactions: summary and conclusions

An analysis of the central educational policy in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium during the last twenty years and also illustrations of administrative decisions and rules, lead to the conclusion that schools are surrounded by a turbulent policy environment. As a consequence principals are confronted with new tasks and are expected to make a variety of decisions. Making decisions always implies providing a justification, explicitly (e.g. a written statement) or implicitly (e.g. through daily activities, procedures, plans, interventions, etc...). In this paper we have selected two areas for decision making and justification: the establishment within the school of internal and external support.

Based on three studies in Primary Schools, involved in a large-scale improvement project, it is fair to say that schools and principals indeed do react very differently. Second, we could distinguish different patterns in the two areas (see scheme 1) and third, the study of local management and policy is an important research topic which deserves serious attention in the next future. In other words, the local policy as it is reflected in daily activities and interventions, is of importance for researchers and policy-makers interested in the changing role of the principal.

Scheme 1: Large-scale improvement projects and the establishment of internal and external support: overview of the main findings

	Internal support	External support
Local Innovation Policy-study	- specific and supportive interventions;	- pro-active linkages; school-focused
	- interventions and activities experienced as an intrinsic part of the project;	
	- internal support mainly organized by the principal	
OR	- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	
	- mostly general interventions;	- passive; not school-focused
	- activities experienced as additional;	
	- internal support mainly organized by external change facilitators	
School-Based Review study	- specific decisions are implemented;	- pro-active; school-focused
	- continuous messages confirming the importance of the innovation;	
	- specific supportive interventions	
OR	- - - - - - - - - - - - - -	
	- accumulation of problems;	- passive
	- importance of innovation unclear	
	- general, loosely organized interventions	
Intervention Study	- problem-solving oriented versus pragmatism;	- dependent: direct impact of external change facilitator

- only planning interventions versus planning and implementation supporting interventions;
- independent: external change facilitator supporting specific problems
- limited evaluation directed interventions

THE CHANGING ROLE OF PRINCIPALS: POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A large-scale improvement policy generally implies the assumption of a direct relationship between central "inputs", local responses and results. According to McLaughlin it is a policy ignoring the contents of what economists called the "black box" of local practices, beliefs and traditions (McLaughlin, 1990, p.11). Contrary to the one-to-one relationship assumed to exist between central policy and local reactions, an analysis at the school level demonstrates that local factors, that are largely beyond the control of policy-makers, shape the nature and quality of change. One of these local factors is the principal, more exactly the way the principal organizes the local reactions in a pro-active or passive way, in an independent or dependent way. So, local capacity to organize internal support and local willingness to work productively with external support are important factors for planning, executing and sustaining innovative efforts.

As observed in the Rand-studies (McLaughlin, 1990, p.12) local variability is the rule, uniformity is the exception. In other words, policy-makers are wrong when they consider this variability as problematic. We believe that given the turbulent policy environment local responses even of a very different nature must be considered as a "natural" reaction. (see also, Knip & van der Vegt, in press).

The establishment of a local policy signals a healthy system, one that is shaping and integrating central policy in ways best suited to local resources, traditions, and clientele. This means the extent and the way the local leadership shapes the local variability are very prominent issues.

Taking into consideration the interaction between central policy and the local school (the principal), how can we construct a framework in which consequences for the role of the principals are structured around some basic issues. Looking at the ideas and findings presented in this paper, it is fair to say that we consider the principal as <u>the organizer of a justifying local policy</u>. Based on our findings we assume that this general task consists of two related <u>sets of activities</u>. First, there is the requirement to assess the influence on the local school of external and internal factors. Second, given this context, a principal should be able to develop some

specific management activities.

The internal functioning of a school is determined by many known but also unknown factors. Effective leadership implies being aware of the main influencing factors, to assess the impact of these factors, but also to assess the possibility of changing these factors. This is a very difficult and complex task. There is no one single person who is able to do this in a productive way; there is a clear need for a leadership team !

Although it is difficult to enumerate the main influencing factors, it is worthwhile to consider the following ones. Schools have still a social and economic responsibility. So, it is a justified expectation that schools accept and organize teaching activities within limits of a national policy. In other words, schools have to accept a centrally stimulating policy. But a central policy always implies limitations (laid down for instance in administrative rules). These limitations have mostly to do with the use of resources (budget and people). Establishing a local policy means to maximize the use of these resources.

Coming down to the local environment it is obvious that schools and the leadership team should work collaboratively with the local stakeholders. One particular task in this context is the organization of a participation council (a topic of the day in the Dutch community in Belgium). But establishing a local policy also means taking into consideration the history of the school, the existing professional culture and traditions, the quality of the staff, changes in the staff, etc... In summary, this set of activities implies a continuous process of assessment and reviewing the state-of-the-art of the local school. But an assessment and a review can only be done in a productive way if the school has developed a long term management based on a vision. There are many indications (see for instance the way schools build up a collaboration with external change facilitators) that this kind of management is momentarily not very well developed. In other words, given the turbulent policy environment there is in each school a clear need for a vision-building group consisting of the principal, members of the middle management of the school and qualified stakeholders from the local environment.

But, as we already indicated, a leadership team should be able to develop some specific management activities. Related to the findings presented in this paper, we believe that the important specific activities concern, first the establishment of an internal support structure, second the optimal use of the existing external support structure, and third the establishment of an assessment center in the school qualified for an ongoing evaluation of the school. These three groups of specific management activities are realized in different ways in a school. There are schools in which there exists no special efforts concerning the three groups of activities. In

other schools, some activities do exist, but in a very loosely or uncoordinated way. In other schools, there is a clear vision - translated into specific activities and structures - about internal and external support and there exist mechanisms for an internal evaluation. In other words, we come to the conclusion that these three groups of activities are actually three important "domains of action" which have a serious impact on the quality of a local policy. It also means that these three "domains of action" can be considered as a framework for the development of a curriculum for training and in-service training of principals. We consider these domains as core elements for such a curriculum, because they guarantee a successful long-term school policy.

A final remark about research consequences. Local variability is a very complex and unpredicable reality, which cannot easily be captured into general rules (McLaughlin, 1990, p.254). Defining the exact role of the principal - or a leadership team - in that process of a developing and changing local policy, is also a difficult undertaking. So, looking for simple, comparable generalization is useless. The analysis of a process is of another nature than the analysis of variance (Berman, 1981, p. 254). And in this context there is one particular task for future research which should be considered: local policy and changes in this policy are the result of an interaction between many events and activities. These many interactions lead to critical decisions (for instance by a principal) which can have a positive or negative influence on the improvement process. So instead of defining variables, it is more appropriate to construct and reconstruct critical decisions and to follow the history of many critical decisions in a school and the impact of these decisions on the improvement process in general. By doing so, one collects also information about the underlying or hidden justification process.

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